

## The Role of the Total Program Model in Urban Agricultural Education

Wendy J. Warner

California Polytechnic State University

Shannon G. Washburn

University of Florida

### Abstract

*In an effort to achieve the goal of having 10,000 quality Agricultural Education programs by the year 2015, areas of expansion must be identified. A logical area of expansion would be in urban school districts where new schools are being built at a rapid pace to accommodate an expanding student population. To increase the number of urban agriculture programs, it is important to understand the current status of Agricultural Education in urban districts. This qualitative study used a grounded theory approach to examine the agriculture curriculum currently being taught in urban schools and the inclusion of FFA and SAE in urban programs. At the completion of the coding process, several categories emerged specific to the integration of curriculum, SAE, and FFA in nine urban Agricultural Education programs.*

### Introduction/Theoretical Framework

At the February 2006 National Agricultural Education Inservice, a long range goal was unveiled to focus on the establishment of 10,000 quality Agricultural Education programs by the year 2015. The National FFA Organization estimates approximately 8,000 Agricultural Education programs exist currently with 7,210 FFA chapters nationwide (National FFA Organization, 2006). If the 10,000 programs by 2015 goal is to be achieved, prospective areas of expansion must be identified. A logical area of expansion would be in urban school districts where new schools are being built at a rapid pace to accommodate an expanding student population. During the 2001–02 school year, there were 47.7 million students enrolled in public schools. Fifty-seven percent of public schools were located in large or midsize cities or their accompanying fringe areas and accounted for 69% of all public school students. In 2001–02, an estimated 1 out of every 6 American students attended a large city school (Hoffman, 2003). The inclusion of Agricultural Education classes in urban schools provides access to a large student population and provides immense potential to increase the current number of Agricultural Education programs.

When describing the Total Agricultural Education Program, typically represented by three interlocking circles, Talbert, Vaughn, and Croom (2005) state, “Agricultural Education has three main program components: classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised experience, and FFA. Each of these components is critical for students to receive full educational benefit.” (p. 106). Additionally, a quality Agricultural Education program is defined as having “a balanced utilization of these three components” (National FFA Organization, 2006, ¶ 9). Warner and Washburn (2006) described several characteristics unique to urban schools. However, limited research exists on curriculum, SAE, and FFA in urban agriculture programs.

Cheek, Arrington, Carter, and Randell (1994) stated that students' participation in Supervised Agricultural Experience programs served as a positive predictor of their level of success in Agricultural Education. Yet, Barrick et al. (1992) recognized SAEs as "one of the most challenging parts of the total Agricultural Education program" (p.7). A synthesis of research by Dyer and Osborne (1996) identified multiple challenges associated with SAE such as grading SAE projects, quality and size of students' SAE programs, incorporation of SAE instruction into the Agricultural Education curriculum, and teacher supervision of SAE projects. From an earlier review of the literature related to SAE, Dyer and Osborne (1995) concluded that "while teachers claim to support the concept of SAE, many fail to implement the programs fully, resulting in decreased participation by students" (p.10). They also found that agriculture teachers in rural schools placed greater emphasis on the SAE component of the Agricultural Education curriculum than teachers in urban schools. When examining the decline in SAEs among agriculture students in New York, Steele (1997) noted that a lack of summer employment, limited time for project supervision, increasing transportation costs, and conflicts with other school activities were barriers to the inclusion of SAE.

Using exploratory factor analysis, Gliem and Gliem (2000) identified factors that encouraged students to join FFA, factors that discouraged students from joining FFA, and factors that could potentially encourage FFA membership. The factors the students credited for their decision to join FFA included personal development, positive image of the FFA, and former family FFA members. Factors cited for students' decisions not to join FFA included negative image of FFA, values conflict, time conflict, and lack of peer involvement. These findings are similar to the findings in a study conducted by Scanlon, Yoder, Hoover, and Johnson (1989) which found that students decided to join FFA to develop leadership and communication skills and for the opportunity to participate in a multitude of activities at the local and state levels. Students who did not join FFA reported they were uninterested in FFA activities and they felt FFA activities were too time-consuming and conflicted with other activities. Additionally, Connors, Moore, and Elliot (1990) stated students who were not interested in joining FFA exhibited minimal interest in agriculture and believed FFA involvement would not make a contribution to their future careers. In a study of 404 students enrolled in Agricultural Education, Croom and Flowers (2001) concluded students' perceptions of their local FFA chapter influenced their decisions to join or not join the organization. The participants who were FFA members provided more positive responses to the items related to the image of the FFA organization when compared to the responses of the non-FFA members.

Russell and Trede (1999) proposed a curriculum model for urban agriculture programs. They emphasized that the curriculum should "reflect current industry needs" (p. 258) and stated the inclusion of topics such as leadership, business management, computers, and personal development could help meet the needs of the industry. An additional recommendation was that the urban curriculum should "emphasize the global dimensions of agriculture, professional development, and hands-on activities" (Russell & Trede, 1999, p.258). While these recommendations certainly have merit, a paucity of research exists examining the unique opportunities and challenges of implementing the total program model in urban Agricultural Education settings. In order to successfully expand Agricultural Education into urban settings, a better understanding of the unique complexion of urban programs is needed.

### Purpose/Objectives

In an effort to increase the number of urban agriculture programs, it is important to understand the current status of Agricultural Education in urban districts. As part of a larger investigation, this study sought to examine the agriculture curriculum currently being taught in urban schools and the inclusion of FFA and SAE in urban programs. The question “What kind of experiences have you had while teaching agriculture in an urban school?” helped provide direction to the research process and allowed the participants to discuss the role of the curriculum, FFA, and SAE in their programs. Additional probing questions were used to expand and clarify statements made by the participants (Hatch, 2002).

### Methods/Procedures

Constructivism was the theoretical perspective guiding this interpretivist research study. The use of constructivism focuses on the unique experiences of each individual and acknowledges the validity of each person's method of making sense of the world (Crotty, 2003). Through the use of in-depth interviews, the researcher and the participants were engaged in the construction of a narrative to detail the participants' decisions to teach in an urban school. Each of the participating teachers had the opportunity to share their distinct beliefs and individual experiences specific to their career decisions.

When selecting participants for the study, a criterion sample (Patton, 2002) was used. The nine participants in the study graduated from teacher education programs and had been teaching in an urban school for one to six years. Four of the participants taught middle school and five of the participants taught high school with their courses ranging from being a general elective course to being a required course in a magnet program. All nine of the schools had large student enrollments. The smallest school had a student enrollment of approximately 1,200 students while the largest school had almost 3,500 students. There were varying FFA enrollments among the nine schools, from a chapter with 10 to 12 active members, to a chapter with 438 middle school FFA members.

Each of the participants participated in an hour-long interview which was audiotaped and later transcribed. The nine interviews yielded an extensive amount of data and the process of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was utilized to generate a conceptual understanding of the concrete realities expressed by the teachers during the interview process (Charmaz, 2003). Coding was used to break down the data and generate categories that formed an initial theory to help explain the inclusion of the “three main program components of the total program model” in urban agriculture programs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### Results/Findings

At the completion of the coding process, several categories emerged specific to the integration of curriculum, FFA, and SAE in an urban agriculture classroom. The category Agricultural Education curriculum in urban schools was comprised of axial codes including teacher flexibility within school restrictions, student-centered curriculum, and curriculum content. The findings presented herein reflect pseudonyms used to identify the nine participants.

The axial code dealing with teacher flexibility within school restrictions is typified by Ms. Brown's experience. Ms. Brown was eager to teach about animal science, but her principal would not allow animals to be housed on the school campus. Although she was initially discouraged by this administrative mandate, it did not deter Ms. Brown from going "gung ho about plants" and focusing on horticulture and aquaculture. She realized that "we are going a different route because I can't have the barn I really thought I would have. Being a Title One school, you can't always get what you want, so I kind of just deal with what I've got."

Ms. Fritz and Mr. Linder stressed the importance of a student-centered curriculum in an urban Agricultural Education program. Mr. Linder involved his students in curriculum planning by asking for their input on what they would like to learn about specific topics, "The first thing I do before I'm going to teach about plants, animals, or the environment is I ask them what they want to know. Then I just combine that with what I think they should know." Ms. Fritz described her goals for trying to make the curriculum more relevant for her students,

I'm trying to get a dog grooming business going here because I feel like that's the future of agriculture at (school) and this area, it's getting the kids working with small animals. I don't think the future is there in those cows and stuff...I think the focus as far as me appealing to the masses of this student population, it's going to have to be through the small animals stuff. Most of my kids, 90% of my kids have never been within five feet of a bovine animal in their life. Probably never will be after they leave my class. But 80 to 85% of them have a cat or dog at home. I think it's making agriculture relatable to those kids and it's not through production. Definitely not in the urban area.

Through his teaching experience, Mr. Flood learned the importance of having a practical application so students could comprehend and retain the subject matter,

I don't have the resources to have large animals here or a very large animal facility, so it's very hard for me to convey my message when I don't have anything for students to apply it to. And I'm learning that as the year goes by that I need to...if I'm going to teach something I need to have an application. That's the purpose of me teaching an applied science, if the students can be able to apply what they're learning somewhere else. And when I was teaching last year, I was teaching more production. I was teaching the production of large animals...I talked about the beef industry, the hog industry and I had nothing to apply it to. I felt like it just went through one ear and out the other for some students.

Mr. Gall and Mr. Linder also offered their opinions on the appropriate curriculum content for urban schools. Mr. Linder discussed the importance of making the subject matter relevant to the students, while incorporating traditional agriculture, "I mean I think it is important to work in traditional agriculture. That can't be your main focus, you know you have to teach it from the community or the consumer based." Mr. Gall re-emphasized the value of implementing "more relevant, consumer based programs." He described several changes that could be made to the agriculture curriculum to ensure that it was appropriate for urban students,

Changing some of the other programs even that we have like the environmental horticulture programs, they can be good for students in urban settings, but as long as there is a focus on interiorscaping, small-scale specialty production of things, basically in places where there is not a lot of space. Hundred acre shade houses of two or three

different crops, that's not practical for an urban student. They can't really wrap their mind around operating something like that. If you are talking about animals then more companion animals. Plants need to be houseplants, ornamental plants and just keeping the science in it and get back to the business side as well. Honestly, I don't know if I can justify teaching my students about ruminant nutrition in-depth because none of them have ever had any experience raising cattle. It is beneficial for them to have kind of an understanding of how that is different, but I'm not going to spend a lot of time telling them about roughage to grain ratios...because they are never going to be doing that. Just making it more relevant to urban settings.

Mr. Hill argued that agriculture programs needed to move away from a more traditional curriculum with an agriculture production focus to a curriculum that emphasized science concepts,

I think agriculture itself, education has to get out of the good old boy mentality. We have to step back and make this the science that it is. Agriculture is the original science. We've got to let people know that Agriculture Education is about everyone and not some country thing. We have got to focus on the kinds of programs like I have...we've got to get rid of those ag welding classes and stuff like that that are just promoting a stereotype. We've got to train students to become scientists, not production farmers. Nobody needs training in being a production farmer, they are already doing it. If somebody is going to be a farmer, then they are coming from a farm and they already know how to do it. So we need to focus our vocation on scientists who are going to better our plants and animals.

In contrast, Ms. Taylor promoted the inclusion of production agriculture in the curriculum,

I know the big fad is not production ag, but consumption ag, but I don't think the interest is there for consumption ag. There is to an extent, but we need to change things and not be so old-fashioned that it's just a crop field and it's just steers and heifers. I don't think we need to sacrifice our roots for urban schools by any means. We are living proof that you can have kids in the ghetto in an ag class, playing in the dirt. I don't think we need to get so far away from that to change everything to consumption ag. I don't think that's the way.

While Ms. Taylor felt that urban students were interested in production agriculture, Mr. Hill was not so optimistic about the level of student interest in a traditional agriculture curriculum in his school,

I just think the kids interests are not in agriculture...so it's an elective. They don't have to take it. When it comes to, do I take art and sit inside where it's air conditioned all day or go outside and get sweaty and dirty, the kids that go to this school don't want to get sweaty and dirty. Period.

The participants reinforced the importance of implementing and delivering a student-centered curriculum, but reported conflicting views on the appropriate curriculum content for an urban agriculture classroom.

The category FFA in urban schools was comprised of four axial codes consisting of FFA activities, student involvement, student achievement and alternative view of the importance of FFA. The FFA members in each of the participants' schools participated in a variety of FFA

events including opening and closing ceremony contest, public speaking, vegetable identification, horse judging, quiz bowl, (state specific event), and land judging. Due to the active involvement of his FFA members, Mr. Flood was better able to identify the contests that his students did not participate in,

We haven't done forestry in awhile, we haven't done (state specific event), or the land judging, but everything else we've done. And we have students who are interested to do that. It's kind of hard to prove to our administration that we're going to do two contests a year with 437 students. It just doesn't make any sense, so we do almost all of them.

Ms. Fritz stated that she found the students' interests in particular FFA events fluctuated from year to year and she was willing to help them prepare for any contests they were interested in, "I tell my kids I'll do any contest they want to do and I'll say all it takes is for you to get four people together and show up for practice twice a week and we'll do it."

Several of the participants were excited to discuss their students' successes in FFA, despite the students' limited agricultural experience. Ms. Campbell was pleased with the accomplishments of her extemporaneous speaker, "our state winner in extemporaneous, she had no prior ag background and she gets to go to state. So seeing that is a huge accomplishment in itself ...she was nervous like anyone would be, but she did great." Mr. Hill bragged on his land judging team,

Try this on for size, in the middle of the city and a bunch of kids that have never had any experience with agriculture, we have one of the most successful land judging teams in (city). (School name), they are the kings, they have been doing this for many years, but the last two years in a row we have come in second only to (school name) in land judging. We have a very strong land judging team.

Even though her extemporaneous speaker did not win a speaking contest, Ms. Brown was proud of her speaker's desire to compete in the event, in spite of her limited English proficiency,

The girl that did do extemporaneous, she's mainly a Spanish speaking girl, so it was really cool for her to learn all the stuff and be speaking in English. That was a challenge for her. Her English is not very good, so it was really cool, you always remember after.

Ms. Campbell summed up how rewarding FFA success could be for agriculture students, "seeing their reaction when they place or get an award, they see all their hard work pay off...seeing them get so excited about that recognition or that acknowledgement of their hard work."

While Ms. Brown's FFA members participated in traditional FFA activities, she also had an alternative perspective on the value of FFA for her students. FFA meetings were an opportunity to "keep them (students) off the streets mainly." She explained the structure of the bi-monthly FFA meetings,

We have fun. We've played soccer before. They like playing Uno, Monopoly. We'll always order a pizza and just chill and hang out. Usually we do it on Fridays...we'll stay until like 7:30, playing...It's fun, it gives them something to do, keep them out of trouble. Whatever they decide they want to do, I'm all about it.

Ms. Brown felt that this unconventional approach to FFA meetings was the most effective in getting her students involved in the organization.

The category, obstacles to FFA involvement, was comprised of four axial codes consisting of student opportunities and involvement, turnover of student population, transportation obstacles, and promoting involvement in FFA.

In terms of student opportunities and FFA involvement, Mr. Gall's comments represented the teacher attitudes comprising this axial code. He felt the multitude of other extracurricular activities and social opportunities available to students hindered their involvement in FFA. He explained, "they have so many different things that they can do on the weekends or after school" and "they have so many other opportunities at school competing for their time." Similarly, Ms. Carter explained that not all paid FFA members attended FFA meetings because "they're high school kids, they've got lives and jobs and things like that." Ms. Brown found it difficult to maintain an active FFA chapter due to the high turnover of the student population, "since Christmas, I've had four of my six officers move and it's like okay, I have two kids left, what do I do? Do I go out and start and get new officers?"

Transportation obstacles also limited student involvement in FFA. Both Mr. Hill and Mr. Flood taught in magnet programs and had students enrolled in their programs who lived in all areas of the county and often far away from the school. Mr. Flood who teaches in (city) explained the reluctance of the parents to allow their children to participate in after-school activities, "The parents are like no, you need to be on that bus at 3:40 and get home because if I have to leave you at school till 4:30 or 5:00, you're not getting home until 6 or 7 and that's hard to sit in traffic and everything else it takes to get back down there. I lose a lot of students because of transportation." Ms. Taylor elaborated on the challenges of preparing a horse judging team, "a lot of these kids don't have a ride to get anywhere. They can't even stay after school because they don't have anybody to pick them up."

Three of the teachers discussed some of the misconceptions that they had to overcome in order to promote student involvement in the FFA. At her first school, Ms. Campbell found it very difficult to educate the students about FFA,

About breaking down the stereotypical redneck farmers that I guess condescending lingo, um, it was difficult trying to come over that barrier and educate them. This is the benefit of this and this is the...what the leadership of that, this is how much fun you can have doing this and showing them and ...it was difficult every year.

In comparison, at Ms. Campbell's current school the FFA membership is four times (n=45) the FFA enrollment of her first school, an increase she credits to family involvement, "a lot of their families are vested in it and they came in wanting to be in FFA." She emphasized the importance of "showing them other avenues and options that FFA has to offer" because often her students are under the impression that they "have to show an animal at the fair to be in FFA." Mr. Gall faced similar obstacles when trying to organize the FFA chapter at his school. He had three students who had been FFA members in middle schools and were excited about continuing their participation in high school, but encountered reluctance from his other students,

Everybody else was just kind of like this is the farming club and that was an automatic perception. So defeating that perception even amongst students that I would consider more open-minded and thinking, being able to think outside the box or beyond themselves have had trouble getting past that perception of it's the farming club.

Multiple obstacles to FFA involvement were identified including multiple student opportunities, high turnover of student population, transportation obstacles, and FFA promotion to urban students.

The category SAE in urban schools consisted of SAE opportunities for students and lack of parental involvement in SAE. The SAE involvement of the students varied among the nine schools. Three of the teachers required all of their students to complete SAE projects. Mr. Flood required his students to “identify an SAE they can do at home and bring a report in.” Mr. Linder offered his students two options for completing their SAE projects. The students could choose to complete either an “agriscience project or a community service project.” Likewise, the students in Ms. Campbell’s classes could select an activity to complete for their SAE. The seventh graders could either research an agricultural career or detail the care that they provided for their pet (s). Ms. Campbell explained how a project as simple as raising a turtle could become an appropriate SAE,

But with turtles, there’s not as much care as caring for a dog, so I always add a little bit more research aspect to them, what’s the breed of turtle, how do you clean the tank, more care aspects....what’s their diet, what happens if they do get sick and what are the illnesses of that breed, a little bit more research-based than the care.

The 8<sup>th</sup> graders also had two options related to pet care or home improvement, They can do a very similar animal care, animal training, but a little more in-depth or if they don’t have a pet, there’s three home improvement options. They can do lawn care, you know mow lawns, they have to do the proper maintenance of their lawn equipment, talk about related jobs, things like that. There’s landscaping where they can re-landscape an area of their house and talk about plants, are they native, non-native, seasons, why would you plant this here and then the last would be a garden. They could do a vegetable or herb garden and why did they choose that, is it the right season, are they getting pesticides or herbicides if so, if not, what’s the benefits and non-benefits of that.

Three of the participants described how many of their students’ SAEs were conducted at school due to the limited amount of space they had at home. Mr. Gall explained that the most common SAEs for his students were,

agriscience projects and then some others doing small animal projects for the fair like a chicken or a rabbit or raising plants for the fair. Most of the students either live in apartments or condos or houses that are built on 60 by 100 square foot lots and so there’s not much space for them to be able to have any kind of project at home.

The barn facilities on the school campus made it possible for the “subdivision and apartment kids” at Ms. Fritz’s school to have large animal SAEs, which were more popular than small animal SAEs. Many of the students at Ms. Taylor’s school also kept their SAE projects at school, which “puts a whole lot more work on the teachers.” Ms. Carter emphasized the importance of helping students identify practical SAEs that would be beneficial in the future,

these kids that are doing pig projects, unless you live in Iowa or Kansas or some place you’re not going into the pig industry. So having a SAE in a vet project, you know, we’re working with aquaculture maybe breeding fish or doing horticulture stuff, that’s so much more practical as far as whether you go to college or not, but you know, a lot of the

kids...I have maybe five kids that work at vet offices. So they're able to apply what they're learning.

Two of the participants felt that a lack of parental involvement was a major barrier to the implementation and completion of SAE projects. Ms. Fritz described the "resistance on the parent's part" as "one of the biggest barriers to the kids doing a project." She thought that since "it is not a way of life for these kids, it's not something that these parents did when they were in school and they realize the value of." Ms. Fritz also shared her perception about rural parents increased involvement in SAE,

it's almost like in a lot of rural schools it's understood, if you want your steer to be weighed at the market, you're going to find a truck and a trailer and you're going to take it over there. For us it's more of the student coming to you and saying, can you haul my steer?

Ms. Taylor also attributed the lack of parental interest for limiting SAE opportunities, "you can't really get too creative with SAEs because no one is going to help. I mean you can only help so much as their advisor."

### Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

While three participants were attracted to their current school by the opportunity to teach a specific curriculum, one participant exhibited a great deal of flexibility in modifying the curriculum she envisioned teaching. Although Ms. Brown was initially disappointed at the inability to maintain animals on the school campus, she focused her efforts on delivering the horticulture curriculum and was planning to teach about aquaculture in the future. Urban agriculture teachers must be flexible, creative, and resourceful when working within the parameters established by administrators. Future research is recommended that examines administrators' perceptions of various agriculture curricula and explores administrators' beliefs regarding the pertinent curriculum topics. During teacher education, preservice teachers should be encouraged to develop lessons on a variety of agriculture curriculum topics. Also, it may be beneficial to place a teaching intern in an agriculture program that requires them to move beyond their "curriculum comfort zone." Such experience can help preservice teachers identify beneficial resources to help in the design of an agriculture curriculum appropriate for their particular school.

Several of the participants stressed the importance of delivering a student-centered curriculum and provided their opinions on the content that should be included in an urban agriculture curriculum. Mr. Gall identified specific topics that he thought would be the most appropriate for urban students including food science, biotechnology, interiorscaping, and companion animals. Trede and Russell (1999) surveyed stakeholders regarding their perceptions on the subject matter topics of importance in an urban agriculture curriculum. They concluded that leadership, environmental science, biotechnology, agriculture business management, and food sciences were appropriate topics to be included in an urban curriculum. However, they did not recognize the importance of small animal science to the urban curriculum, which was mentioned by four of the participants in the current study. The development of lesson plans and curriculum guides, especially in the areas of food science, biotechnology, and small animal science can assist urban teachers in classroom instruction.

Participants expressed a need to deliver a consumer-based program that emphasized the scientific aspects of agriculture. Trede and Russell (1999) made a similar recommendation to emphasize science-based topics in the urban agriculture curriculum. However, among the participants there was disagreement about the role of production agriculture in the urban agriculture curriculum. One participant felt that students were more interested in production agriculture as compared to consumption agriculture. In contrast, another participant contended that a traditional, production oriented agriculture curriculum would not appeal to the students in his high school. It is difficult to conclude that one specific curriculum is appropriate for every urban school. Current and former urban agriculture students could assist in designing agriculture curriculums they feel would be the most relevant and beneficial in preparing urban students for future educational and/or career paths. As well, an advisory board composed of individuals representing local agricultural businesses/industries could assist in the identification of curriculum topics pertinent to the community. Advisory board members could also assist urban teachers in locating field trip sites and securing student SAE opportunities in the vicinity of the school.

There was a striking difference in the FFA enrollment and levels of student involvement among the nine schools. The smallest chapter had approximately 10 to 12 active FFA members, while the largest FFA chapter had approximately 438 paid members, with about 100 of those members involved in some type of FFA activity. In an effort to increase the level of FFA participation among urban students, FFA advisors in urban schools should share strategies used in the recruitment and retention of active FFA members. Additionally, urban agriculture students should be interviewed to examine what factors encourage their participation in FFA activities.

In urban schools, there were multiple obstacles to the FFA involvement of students. The schools offered numerous extracurricular clubs and after-school activities that competed with FFA for the students' time and interest. Lass (1989) surveyed agriculture students in Louisiana to determine what factors influenced their decisions to join or not join FFA. For agriculture students who decided not to join FFA, one of the items credited for this decision was "I am involved in too many other activities to join the FFA" (Lass, 1989, p. 347). Also, many of the high school students held part-time jobs that limited their amount of free time. The high number of transient students served as a challenge to one participant. This rapid turnover of students made it difficult to maintain continuity in the FFA chapter. Transportation obstacles made it difficult for many of the urban students to participate in FFA activities beyond the normal school hours, especially in the magnet programs. The work schedules of parents or family reliance on public transportation limited their availability to pick students up after school. Additionally, the large volume of traffic in urban areas hindered the parent's ability to commute to the school in a reasonable amount of time.

As a result of these challenges to student involvement in FFA, teachers need to look beyond the "traditional" after-school FFA meeting. With the large FFA membership at Mr. Flood's school, his FFA officers were assigned to his homeroom class. During this homeroom time, the officers would plan chapter events and activities and then travel to the other homerooms to notify other FFA members. Teachers may also hold FFA meetings during their lunch time or designate one day every two weeks or once a month as FFA day and hold smaller FFA meetings within each class period. Often preparation for Career Development Events takes

place after school, which can limit student participation. Agriculture teachers could create a website with contest preparation materials so that students could practice at home. For students who do not have access to the internet, the teacher could create kits containing the preparation materials that the students could take home and study. While these suggestions are not perfect substitutions for practicing at school under the supervision of a teacher, they do allow for the participation of students who may not have access to after-school transportation. Research could be used to determine if such alternatives help increase the level of student involvement in FFA.

The level of student participation in SAE varied among the nine schools. In three of the middle schools, all students were required to complete an SAE in the form of a class assignment. These students were given several options to complete the SAE requirement. At one school they could complete an agriscience fair project or community service. At another school, they could select a project on agricultural careers, animal care, or home improvement. Participants who did not require SAE as a class assignment did not have SAE participation from all of their students. In a few of the schools, SAEs were only required for FFA members. The dissemination of SAE-related project ideas, as well as evaluation criteria could assist urban teachers in increasing the SAE participation of their students. Since a majority of the urban students lived in apartment complexes or housing developments, most of the large animal SAEs were maintained on the school property. Due to the increase of agriculture students living in urban and suburban areas, Dyer and Osborne (1996) recommended that school systems should provide appropriate lab facilities for students to conduct SAE programs on the school campus.

The participants cited a lack of parental involvement as an obstacle to student SAEs. They felt that parents were necessary to assist the students in developing and completing SAE projects. Even in the absence of parental support, agriculture teachers need to assist students in identifying SAEs that they can complete. Agriculture teachers and students may believe an appropriate SAE has to have “a halter attached.” Many SAEs can be relevant to the everyday life of students, as evidenced by the SAE projects completed by Ms. Campbell and Mr. Flood’s students. Some preservice teachers may have limited ideas for potential SAE projects based on their prior experience in Agricultural Education. SAE tours could be planned to expose preservice teachers to more of the “non-traditional” SAEs of current agriculture students. Alumni members and/or booster club members can assist agriculture teachers in providing supervision and guidance for students’ SAE projects. Also, agriculture students in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade can be paired with new students to help identify potential SAE projects and to provide encouragement and answer questions as these students begin their first projects.

#### References

- Barrick, R.K., Arrington, L., Heffernan, T., Hughes, M., Moody, L., Ogline, P., Whaley, D. (1992). *Experiencing agriculture: A handbook on supervised agricultural experience*. Alexandria: The National Council for Agricultural Education.
- Charmaz, K. (2003). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J.A. Holstein & J.F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Cheek, J.G., Arrington, L.R., Carter, S., & Randell, R.S. (1994). Relationship of Supervised Agricultural Experience program participation and student achievement in agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 35* (2), 1-5.
- Connors, J., Moore, E., & Elliot, J. (1990). Factors influencing secondary Michigan agricultural students' decisions not to join the FFA. *Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Research Meeting, 17*, 19-26.
- Croom, D.B., & Flowers, J.L. (2001). Factors influencing an agricultural education student's perception of the FFA organization. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 42* (2), 28-37.
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Dyer, J.E., & Osborne, E.W. (1995). Participation in Supervised Agricultural Experience programs: A synthesis of research. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 36* (1), 6 – 14.
- Dyer, J.E., & Osborne, E.W. (1996). Developing a model for Supervised Agricultural Experience program quality: A synthesis of research. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 37* (2), 24-33.
- Gliem, R., & Gliem, J. (2000). Factors that encouraged, discouraged, and would encourage students in secondary agricultural education programs to join the FFA. *Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Research Conference, 27*, 251-263.
- Hatch, J.A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hoffman, L.M. (2003). *Overview of public elementary and secondary schools and districts: School year 2001–02* (NCES 2003411). Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Lass, C.B. (1989). Factors that influence second year vocational agriculture students' membership status in the FFA. *Proceedings of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Research Meeting, Orlando, FL*, 343–350.
- National FFA Organization (2006). FFA Statistics. Retrieved October 9, 2006 from [www.ffa.org](http://www.ffa.org)
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Russell, D., & Trede, L. (1999) Developing an urban agriculture education program: A proposed model. *Proceedings of the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Conference, Orlando, FL*, 251–263.
- Scanlon, D.C., Yoder, E.P., Hoover, T.S., & Johnson, S.S. (1989). Factors affecting past and prospective enrollments in secondary school agricultural education programs and FFA

membership. Paper presented to the National FFA Board of Directors, Alexandria, VA.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Steele, R. (1997). Analysis of the continuing decline in use of Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in New York state. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 38 (2), 49-58.

Talbert, B.A., Vaughn, R., Croom, D.B. (2005) *Foundations of Agricultural Education*. Catlin, IL: Professional Educators Publications Inc.

Trede, L., & Russell, D.(1999) Perceptions of stakeholders toward linkages and curriculum in urban agricultural education programs. *Proceedings of the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual National Agricultural Education Conference*, 240–250.

Warner, W.J., & Washburn, S.G. (2006). Issues facing urban agriscience teachers: A delphi study. *Proceedings of the 56<sup>th</sup> Southern Agricultural Education Research Conference*, Orlando, FL.